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THE TALENTED MR. GRUFFUDD

“I am so sorry to have kept you waiting,” Ioan Gruffudd apologizes sincerely, sounding just as charming on the phone as he does on television.

WORDS BY **CHRISTI KASSITY** PHOTOS BY **KARL SIMONE**

In an industry of “hurry up and wait,” it is nothing I hadn’t experienced before, but it was refreshing to be met with an apology. That doesn’t often happen in Hollywood. Then again, Ioan Gruffudd isn’t your average Hollywood actor. While the Welsh native has lived in Los Angeles for the better part of ten years, neither his accent nor his humility have been greatly affected.

He had a good reason for running behind though: he just returned from a photoshoot for his new ABC show *Forever*, which premieres this month.

He also brought up our own photoshoot from the previous day, and his humility continued to shine as he praised our photographer Karl Simone: “You get used to having somebody with a camera and a computer next to him, and you get to see the images [right away]. He didn’t need all that, he just got the camera and started shooting. It was like a photoshoot from the past; you don’t get to see any of the images. You just have to trust him, and he certainly knew what he was doing.”

I admit it: I had been nervous all week about this interview. From his leading role in *Horatio Hornblower* and his smaller role in *Titanic* to the canceled-

too-soon *Ringer* and nearly everything in between - I’ve been a fan, and it’s always given me a belly full of butterflies to talk to anybody I admire. Even before we were able to get into the interview, Ioan (it’s pronounced «yo-ahn») had me feeling as if I were talking to an old friend.

Forever follows New York City medical examiner Dr. Henry Morgan as he not only solves murders, he attempts to solve the secret of his own inexplicable immortality. «In the pilot, Henry is shot -- about 200 years ago -- on a slave ship coming to America, and his body is tossed overboard,» he explains. «That evening, he comes back to life, for whatever reason. We don’t know what that is. From that point onwards, he is kind of frozen in time as a 35-year-old, and whenever he does die, be it from a disease, or he gets shot or gets killed for whatever reason, he’s resurrected.»

If you think the premise sounds a bit familiar, you could be thinking of the short-lived Fox drama *New Amsterdam*, or possibly (but more unlikely) the book titled *Forever* about a man who is granted immortality as long as he does not leave the island of Manhattan. To clarify: the show is *not* based off either

of these, and while there are parallels, the show is its own unique entity.

I asked Ioan about his thoughts on the inevitable comparisons: «I just thought it was unique. I hadn’t seen *New Amsterdam*, and I haven’t read the novel also called *Forever* which people have also been claiming that this is a take on, but I thought it was so unique, so clever, and really honest and innocent.

«What’s beautiful is we’ve got this case-of-the-week, every week, where [Henry] is very smart, and bright, and sort of Sherlockian. He helps to solve the case every week. The serialization of the series would then be the flashbacks and [Henry’s] history, past loves, and everything that he’s learned, and loved, and lost over time. You could call it unique in that sense, especially for a network show. It’s not just your standard procedural show; there is a bit of drama involved.»

One of the quirky bits of Henry Morgan’s resurrections is that he always wakes up in water -- and he’s always naked. That is, of all things, Ioan’s least favorite part of filming the show. «I wish I had time and energy to build up my body like Hugh Jackman or Dwayne Johnson. There are just not enough hours of the

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day to turn my body into that kind of body, so I am doing it in reverse. I'm sort of not eating much at all, and we are painting on the abs.»

«Airbrushed abs - I'm sure that's how Chris Evans does it as well,» I joke, referring to his *Fantastic Four* costar and real-life friend.

Just as his character in *Forever* must grow and adapt to the changing times, Ioan has found himself being gradually dragged into the 21st century: «I just arrived to Twitter this week... I don't know how it works yet or how you get more followers... I haven't quite grasped the hashtag element of it.»

The phenomenon, and a bit ironic sense of «social» media, isn't entirely lost on him, though: «When you're out in the street or in an elevator or waiting in a waiting room, nobody talks to one another anymore; we're all looking down at our bloody screens. So, socially, as much as everybody says «Hey, isn't it great because we're all socializing with one another?» but

its only in a virtual world, we're not actually socializing with the person in front of us. We are ignoring them by looking down. For me, when I get the odd moment of downtime that I have, it's actually quite fun to see my friend Piers Morgan being lambasted again by people and him sort of standing up for himself and coming out with some outrageous statement. It's a lot of fun to see the back and forth, especially for the people who've got real followers.»

While he is in New York filming, Ioan has had to leave his wife and two daughters behind in Los Angeles: «It's one of those things as actors we've dealt with all our careers; that sort of nomadic lifestyle... It's pretty tough at the moment on me, emotionally, because we work hard and work such crazy hours on the show.» He reminds himself that he's doing this for his family, and his dedication to his «girls» is wholly apparent.

What is a man to do, when he is without his family? One thing I found we have

in common is our love for good old English Football (or soccer, if you must). Turns out we both root for Liverpool, and for a few minutes we discuss our disappointment in losing Luis Suarez and our faith in manager Brendan Rodgers.

What else keeps him occupied? There's The Art of Elysium, a wonderful organization with which he is involved. It's about «bringing creativity and art either through the medium of music or art itself -- like painting -- or acting and drama... We bring a bunch of actors to do some sort of improvisational storytelling in schools and hospitals, either for the children themselves, to have some stimulus and entertainment, or even for the families who are there all day, everyday with their children who have very serious illnesses and conditions.»

Cheers, Ioan. You'll never walk alone.

ABC will offer a sneak peek of Forever on September 22. You can follow Ioan on Twitter @IoanGruffudd.

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